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ROMANCE AND RELIGION IN COLLEGE:  
THE PREDICTORS OF QUALITY IN COLLEGE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULMILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF  
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### **Abstract**

The primary goal of the current study was to investigate the influence of religion, conflict, sex, and duration on the quality of romantic relationships in college. The transition period of college lends itself to new opportunities and experiences in which young adults learn to express themselves within different types of romantic relationships. One aspect of college that influences these relationships is the emerging “hookup” culture, leading to relationships being less of a norm in college settings. Another influence of college is the diversity of students within the college setting, yielding higher rates of intercultural (or in the case of this study, interfaith) relationships between students. There is little research about how interfaith relationships in college fair in contrast to intrafaith relationships. Thus, the current study was designed to address the gap in the literature on how religious similarity factors into overall relationship quality, along with sexual intimacy, conflict, and duration of relationship. Results reveal that religious similarity and overall religiosity do not influence the quality of relationships in college. However conflict and duration were found to negatively influence the quality of relationships and sexual intimacy showed a strong positive influence on the quality of relationships in college. This study uncovers the predictors of quality in romantic relationships in a college environment.

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to look into the influence of religion on quality of college relationships. College is a transition period between adolescence and adulthood where social influences are especially heightened (Auslander & Rosenthal, 2010) as well as adolescents facing a wide array of choices about academics, work, love, and friendships (Burt & Masten, 2010). This is also a period when young adults experiment sexually and learn how to establish sexual intimacy (Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006). Young adults seek out the company of someone they can feel intimate with emotionally and sexually (Reiter, Krause, & Stirlen, 2005). Religion influences the choices that people make throughout their lives and it is important to look into how it influences relationships. Religion has been looked at as a factor influencing marriage and relationships after college (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995); but it hasn't necessarily been looked at relative to young adults in college. Interfaith relationships, or intercouples, can be similar to interracial relationships in the stressors that they face and the other influences on relationship quality.

### **College/Adolescent Relationships**

According to Sullivan (1953) adolescence marks a period of time in regard to the development of intimate relationships. Intimacy and social support of relationships has been shown to have mediating factors for college students however these relationships do dissolve for a litany of reasons. The stability of relationships are dependent on the factors most pertinent to the partners in the relationships, however satisfaction with relationships, overall length of relationship, exclusivity in the relationship and satisfaction with sexual relations in the relationship has shown to be mediating factors against the dissolution of relationships for college students (Simpson, 1987).

Parental and peer support of relationships can either negatively or positively affect the quality of a relationship. The principle of transitivity suggests that transitive relationships, those where peers/family approve of the partner, are relatively stable. Whereas intransitive relationships tend to negatively influence the individual in the relationship along with the relationship as a whole (Parks, Stan, & Eggert, 1983). Perceived support from one's own family has also shown to have a greater influence on commitment and satisfaction of a relationship than perceived support from the partner's family and friends. Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) also discuss the relationship between social network approval and relationship quality identifying that support and approval has a positive effect on the satisfaction and commitment of the relationships.

While most individuals believe that sex should occur within steady committed relationships, not all sexual encounters occur in these settings but rather in less committed situations (Auslander & Rosenthal, 2010). "Hooking-up," a term that has come to be known as defining casual sexual interactions, has started to become the norm on college campuses when it comes to sexual behavior (Bogle, 2008). Dating and relationships have been put to the wayside on college campuses in favor of non-committed relationships, which could be due to the stress of college and students thinking relationships would take up too much time. Students show an understanding of formal dating, however it appears that it is not something they engage in very often in college (Stinson, 2010). Because dating is seen as a more casual social engagement, this informality may influence the development of non-committed sexual situations (Manning et al., 2006). According to Stinson (2010), although hooking-up has become the norm it has been shown to lead to psychological distress in students, which could be because attachment is easy in

sexual situations and in a non-committed situation students could easily “fall” for their non-committal partner and end up having anxiety over the situation.

The easy assumption for religious students would be that they do not fall prey to this kind of relationship and studies have found that although they are not immune to it, they are less likely to engage in the behavior. Ellison, Burdette, Hill, and Glenn (2009) studied the “hooking up” culture of college women and found that Catholic women were far more likely to have “hooked up” when in college than women with no religious affiliation. They found significant differences between Catholic, Protestant, and non-religious females and did not take into account the religious affiliation of their sexual partner. They found that religious involvement overall (excluding Catholic students) reduces “hooking-up” and this pattern is driven not by religious affiliation but by religious service attendance. Helm, McBride, Knox, and Zusman (2009) found that even in a sample whose overall age is characterized by over-sexuality, religious sub-cultural belief systems has had success in reducing high levels of sexual activity. Helm, et al., (2009) focused on the effects of conservative religion on premarital sexual behavior of college students.

Romantic relationships in college have become less of a norm than “hooking-up” has. However, committed relationships have been found to increase well being and mental health in college students. Braithwaite, Delevi, and Fincham (2010) studied the physical and mental health benefits of romantic relationships. According to the social support hypothesis, marriage provides spouses with emotional satisfaction and can act as a protection against stress in daily life (Braithwaite, et al., 2010). The social support hypothesis can also be related to committed romantic relationships, which is shown in Braithwaite, et al., (2010) findings that college students in committed relationships experience greater well-being and mental health than single college students. This can be attributed to partnered students having more social and emotional

support from their relationship. Similarly students in close romantic relationships with secure attachment styles have been found to have higher feelings of academic competence and are more likely to explore socially and academically (Aspelmeier & Kerns, 2011).

Similarity in religious practice has been also shown to be highly influential in terms of partner choice and dating for religious college students (Easterling, Knox, & Tyson, 2010). Easterling et al., (2010) looked into whether prayer in undergraduate students influenced their choice of significant other. They found that students who prayed more frequently were more likely to look for partners who not only prayed themselves but also would pray with each other. College students who are religious and pray often are likely to only engage in intrafaith relationships. (Easterling, et al., 2010).

#### General Influences on Relationships

Hassebrauck and Fehr (2002) define the dimensions of relationship quality as intimacy, agreement, independence, and sexuality. They ran two studies and in both found that intimacy was highly correlated with overall relationship quality and satisfaction of the participants. However, despite the popular belief that sexuality is highly important for relationships they found that in intimate relationships, understanding and caring proved to be far more important than relating to one other in the bedroom. If intimacy is seen as an important aspect of relationships, not just sexual intimacy, it may be possible that intimacy in religious relationships is also important, even if the relationships are not sexual.

Similarities in a wide range of domains have shown to be important in the selection of romantic partners (Luo, 2008). Luo (2008) studied the effects of similarity on early dating couples' relationship satisfaction and partner selection. Luo found that early dating couples showed strong similarity when it came to values, attitude, and demographics, but weaker



similarity on personality domains. This shows that although couples may appear to be similar demographically and value wise, overall similarity in personality traits may not be that important. Some studies have been done to look at the influence of similarity on marital success and satisfaction.

Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) looked at the ties between personality dimensions and similarity on marital quality. They found that although some personality traits were significant in influencing marital quality, overall similarity between partners' personalities might not necessarily be tied to marital happiness. Perceived similarity in relationships has also been found to be correlated with relationship quality, commitment, and communication in the relationship.

Communication and conflict resolution are key attributes to have in high quality relationships. Being able to express problems to a partner and find a resolution leads to higher satisfaction in relationships (Lintzinger & Gordon, 2005). Lloyd (1987) found that conflicts and the resolution of these conflicts were much more salient in the perceptions of relationship quality for female participants. Number and stability of conflicts were much more salient to the perceptions of relationship quality for males (Lloyd, 1987). Along the lines of resolution are perceived satisfaction with communication quality and quantity. It has been found that communication quality, rather than quantity, is more influential on relationship satisfaction and intimacy. The amount of communication does not necessarily matter but the quality of communication for maintaining a high quality relationship does (Lloyd 1987).

Commitment in relationships has also been shown to be a highly influential factor on the quality of relationships. Rusbult (1980) did a study on commitment and satisfaction in romantic relationships and found that the investment in the relationships (intrinsic or extrinsic) increased

the commitment in the relationship, and in a future study (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986) determined that as commitment level increased, satisfaction level in the relationships increased as well.

### Intercultural Relationships

Interracial relationships have been highly scrutinized as to whether they yield lower levels of stability, quality, and satisfaction within the relationship than intraracial relationships. Reiter, Richmond, Stirlen, and Kompel (2009) define intercultural relationships as relationships between two individuals who come from different religions, cultures, or races and define their relationships as being romantic. Individuals generally prefer to date and associate with other individuals of their own racial group (Joyner & Kao, 2005). However over the past couple of decades, marriage rates for interracial couples has increased (Reiter, et al., 2005). Although some studies have found that overall there is no difference between quality of relationship between interracial and intraracial relationships, there are still social stigmas against interracial relationships that may negatively impact the stability of these relationships (Joyner & Kao 2005; Kao, Joyner, & Wang, 2005).

In 2004, Wang, Kao and Joyner, conducted a study to look at the stability of interracial and intraracial relationships among adolescents. They found that adolescents were more likely to end a relationship that was interracial than intraracial relationships. Adolescents who were in interracial relationships were also far more likely to keep their relationships out from under the public eye, believing that their peers or family would not approve of their relationship (Kao & Joyner, 2004). On the other end of this spectrum, Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau (2006) found in two studies that overall there were no differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style between interracial and intraracial relationships. This finding suggests that the

belief that interracial relationships deal with more problems than intraracial relationships may faulty.

Reiter, et al., (2009) studied intimacy in relation to intercultural and intracultural relationships in college students. They wanted to see whether perceived intimacy was different between the two subsets of participants. They found significant differences between the two subsets of participants indicating that those who were in intercultural relationships perceived their levels of intimacy to be lower than those in intracultural relationships. They attribute these differences to the social pressures of being in a society that may not be fully accepting of intercultural relationships. Societal pressures against relationships can have negative influences on the relationship and make those who are in the relationship less likely to view it positively. Therefore societal pressures against intercultural relationships can be assumed to influence the perceived intimacy in these relationships, especially for adolescents who are highly influenced by the approval of their family and peers (Parks, et al., 1983; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992).

Joyner and Kao (2005) studied interracial relationships during the transition to adulthood. They found that as age increases, involvement in interracial relationships decreases. They also found that currently, interracial relationships were more common among cohabitating relationships than among marriages. Older individuals will be more concerned with relationships ending in marriage and may be less likely to form interracial relationships.

As levels of interracial dating have increased so have overall levels of intercouple dating (i.e., dating someone outside of your faith, race, or ethnic groups). Reiter, et al., (2005) studied intercouple dating on college campuses. They found that out of their participants over 60% reported having been in an intercouple relationship, which shows that rates of intercouple dating is not that uncommon on college campuses. They suggest that because of higher enrollment rates

of minorities in colleges there is an increase in interracial dating. Increases in minority enrollment gives universities more diversity allowing for there to be more availability in interracial dating.

The findings related to inter- vs. intraracial relationships can be related to interfaith relationships. There are very few studies that look into the influence of religion or other influences on college relationships. Some outside influences that can be correlated with religion are similarity and conflict theories. Personality similarity in partners has been found to lead to higher quality relationships and more psychological benefits in the relationship (Morry, Kito, & Ortiz, 2011).

The current study looked into the influence of religion on romantic relationships in college through a multiple linear regression model. Religion has been studied in relation to marriage (Booth, Johnson, & Branaman, 1995) but not college relationships, which are more easily influenced by the surrounding social atmosphere. College relationships are more easily influenced because of the social cognitive theory that individuals develop skills and behaviors based off of models in their environment (Auslander & Rosenthal, 2010) and living on a college campus provides a setting where young adults are in constant contact with peers in dorms or classrooms.

Sexuality in college students may also have an influence on religious belief because although some religions prohibit the act of sex before marriage, sexual intercourse has become a norm for college-aged individuals (Sprecher, 2002). This study will look into the levels of intimacy and sexuality of college relationships and any differences between religious and non-religious students on these dimensions.

Putting together all the past research relationships in college are more likely to be defined as high quality if the two partners share similarities in religion (whether both religious or both non-religious), if they are open about concerns/conflicts, and if they share similar values in sexuality and intimacy.

### Hypotheses

1. Religious similarity will positively influence the reported quality of relationship.
2. Conflict will negatively influence the reported quality of relationships.
3. Duration will negatively influence the reported quality of relationships.
4. Sexual intimacy will positively significantly influence the quality of relationship.

## Method

### Participants

Out of the 139 participants who completed the study, 35 (25.2%) were males and 104 (74.8%) were females. The age range was from 18-23; the mean was 20.35(SD= 1.069). Academic class status ranged from freshman to seniors in undergraduate college. There were 3 freshman (2.2%), 31 (22.2%) sophomores, 29 (20.9%) juniors, and 76 (54.7%) seniors.

Out of the 139 participants, 114 (82%) identified as Caucasian, 9 (6.4%) Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 (2.2%) Hispanic, and the other 13 (9.4%) identified with a range of other ethnicities.

Religiosity ranged from very religious to very non-religious. Out of the 139 participants, 26 (18.7%) were very religious, 32 (23%) were somewhat religious, 40 (28.8%) were somewhat non-religious, and 41 (29.5%) were very non-religious. Forty (28.8%) participants identified as Christian, 19 (13.7%) as Jewish, 16 (11.5%) as Catholic, 29 (20.9%) as Agnostic, and the

remaining 35 (25.2%) of participants identified as being in a variety of other religions, such as Mormon or Atheist.

## **Materials**

The only material used in the study was a survey designed to measure specific variables of religiosity, religious similarity, sex, conflict, and duration in relationships. The survey consisted of a set of questions on past and present relationships, the majority of which consisted of questions with answers provided on a 4-point Likert scale (1 being: strongly agree and 4: strongly disagree). The survey consisted of four sections: demographics, religiosity, current relationship, and past relationship. (See Appendix A for full survey questions).

After demographics the survey continued on to current relationship questions. If participants were not in a current relationship they clicked “no” to the question “Are you currently in a romantic relationship” and moved onto the “past relationship” section of the survey. The questions for current and past relationships were identical to one another except past relationship questions being in the past tense. In the two relationship sections there were four subsections with questions about religious similarity, quality, duration, sexuality, and conflict in the relationships.

## **Measures**

Quality of relationship in this study is defined in terms of whether participants view their relationships positively overall, feel intimate with their partner both physically and emotionally, have low conflict levels in the relationship, and feel secure with levels of sexuality. These 3 dimensions follow partially in suit with Hassebrauck and Fehr’s dimensions of quality: intimacy, agreement, independence, and sexuality. This study will use intimacy, conflict, duration and sexuality as the predictors influencing quality.

*Demographic Measures*

Demographic questions consisted of questions about participant's age, college, year in college, and ethnicity.

Religiosity was measured through questions asking the participant about how religious they consider themselves, their family, how often they practice, etc. Examples of these questions are "How religious do you consider yourself?" and "How likely are you to reach out to your religion for support in everyday life?" Answers for the first question were provided on a 4-point Likert scale (1: Very Religious and 4: Very Non-Religious), and answers for the second question were provided on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Very Likely and 5: N/A not religious).

*Current/Past Relationship Measures*

Quality was measured through statements asking the participant to rate their perceived overall quality of the relationship, how supported they feel/felt by their significant other, how open they are/were with their significant other, and how supported they feel/felt by their significant other. Examples of these statements are "I would rate the overall quality of our relationship positively," and "While under a large amount of stress, I feel my significant other is/was able to support me." Answers were provided on a 4-point Likert scale (1 being: strongly agree and 4: strongly disagree).

*Religious Similarity*

Religious similarity between partners was determined based off of the following statement "Please select the option that you most identify with: 1) My significant other and I are both religious, 2) My significant other and I are both religious but follow different religious 3) My significant other and I are both non-religious 4) My significant other is religious and I am not

and 5) My significant other is not religious and I am.” Answers 1 and 2 indicated religious similarity and answers 3,4 and 5 indicated religious dis-similarity.

### *Conflict Measures*

Conflict was measured through a series of statements about amount of conflict in the relationship, whether the participant felt their significant other is/was open to their concerns during conflict, etc. Examples of these statements are “My significant other and I fight/fought often,” and “When in a conflict with my significant other, I feel/felt that they were open to my concerns.”

### *Sexual Intimacy*

Sexual intimacy was measure on whether the participant was sexually active, specifying this including vaginal, oral, and anal sex; whether the participant was physically intimate, including kissing and holding hands; whether the participant was happy with the level of intimacy, and whether they shared similar values in sexual relations with their significant other. An example of one these questions is “I am happy with the level of intimacy with my significant other” and the answers to the questions were provided on a 4-point Likert scale (1: strongly agree and 4: strongly disagree).

### *Duration*

Duration of relationship was measure by the following questions, “How long were you together?” with the answer options being “1) less than one month, 2) 1-3 months, 3) 4-6 months, 4) 7-12 months, 5) over a year-2 years, and 6) 2+ years.”

## **Procedure**

The participants in this study were recruited through the online networking website Facebook.com using convenience sampling, targeting sample of university students. An event



was created on Facebook.com to recruit the participants. Participants were invited to be part of the event. A link to an online survey using surveymonkey.com was presented on the event page along with a brief explanation of the study. Participants were asked to add friends to the event group on Facebook.com in order to increase participants and increase the amount of participants from other universities

The survey began with an informed consent page whereby participants were asked to provide consent before beginning the survey. Along with informed consent the participants were required to agree that they had been in or currently were in a romantic relationship, and were currently enrolled in college. After clicking “yes” to the consent question and qualification questions (answered by clicking one “yes” button), participants were moved on to the beginning of the survey. In the survey, if the participants were not currently in a relationship they moved directly onto past relationship questions. If they were in a current relationship but had not previously been in one the survey ended for them after current relationship questions. Participants were debriefed at the end of the survey.

Once the data was entered into SPSS participants in current relationships were combined with students in past relationships to get the data into one pool in order to run regressions and correlations.

## **Results**

Out of the 139 participants there were 63 participants in current relationships and 76 participants who reported on past relationships. Out the 139 participants 93(67.4%) were/had been sexually active with their significant other and 76(32.6%) are/were not sexually active with their significant other.

The descriptive statistics of predictors of relationship quality are shown in *Table 1*. The mean quality score was 6.27 out of 16, indicating an overall low level of quality. The mean duration score was 3.99 placing the overall duration of relationships in between the 4-6 month duration and 7-12 months. The mean for conflict was 14.10 out of 19 indicating a fairly high level of conflict in the relationships. In the conflict measure the mean for couples fighting often was 3.22 and the mean for believing their partner was open to their concerns was 1.76. Religious similarity was shown to have a mean of 2.62 placing the majority of the relationships in the “My significant other and I are/were both religious but follow different religions” category, implying religious dissimilarity. The mean for sexual intimacy was 3.96 out of 7 placing it on the higher range of the category.

*Table 1*

Descriptive Statistics for predictors of relationship quality in college relationships

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>No. Of Items</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Conflict	6	14.10	2.96
Duration	1	3.99	1.48
Sexual Intimacy	3	3.96	1.16
Religious Similarity	1	2.62	1.19
Religiosity	3	9.78	4.44

Pearson Correlations were computed to assess the relationship between quality of relationship and sexual intimacy, conflict, duration, religiosity, and religious similarity.

There was a significant relationship between the quality of relationship and sexual intimacy in a positive direction ( $r = 0.359, p < 0.05$ ). The fourth hypothesis of the current study

was supported by these results. There was a significant relationship between quality of relationship and conflict in a negative direction ( $r = -0.354, p < 0.05$ ), which supports the second hypothesis of this study, and a significant relationship between quality of relationship and duration in a negative direction as well ( $r = -0.303, p < 0.05$ ), which supports the third hypothesis of this study.

There were nonsignificant relationships found between quality of relationship and religious similarity ( $r = 0.107, p = 0.104$ ) and quality of relationship and religiosity ( $r = 0.065, p = 0.223$ ). The first hypothesis of this study was not supported by these results.

After the initial correlations were run a multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the relationship between relationship quality and conflict, duration, religious similarity, religiosity, and sexual intimacy in the relationship. A forward stepwise method was used to test the variables one by one and including them if they were statistically significant. Levels of  $F$  to enter and  $F$  to remove were set to correspond to  $p$  levels of 0.05 and 0.1. Results shown in *Table 2*.

The variables in the model accounted for 29.6% of the variance in the quality of relationships with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.296. The overall  $F$  for the three-variable model was 18.89,  $df = 3, 135, p < 0.05$ .

Sexual intimacy was a significant predictor ( $B = 0.663, \beta = 0.315, p < 0.05$ ) and produced an  $R^2$  of 0.129 showing that sexual intimacy produced 12.9% of an influence on quality of relationships.

Conflict in romantic relationships was a significant predictor ( $B = -0.295, \beta = -0.357, p < 0.05$ ) and produced an  $R^2$  of 0.135 showing that conflict produced 13.5% of an influence on quality of relationships

Duration of romantic relationships was a significant predictor ( $B=-0.309$ ,  $\beta = -0.187$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and produced an  $R^2$  of 0.031 showing that duration produced 3.1% of an influence on quality of relationships.

*Table 2*

Regressions predicting quality of romantic relationships

Predictor	$R^2$	$R^2$ Change	F Change	Sig. F Change	Beta
Sexual Intimacy	0.129	0.129	20.272	0.000*	0.315
Conflict	0.264	0.135	25.031	0.000*	-0.357
Duration	0.296	0.031	6.020	0.015*	-0.187

\* $p<0.05$

## Discussion

The current study was designed to explore the influence of religion, conflict, sex, and duration of relationship on the quality of romantic relationships in college. The results of this study support three out of the four hypotheses made at the beginning. It was found that conflict and duration negatively influenced the relationships and sexual intimacy positively influences the relationships. Religious similarity did not significantly influence the quality of the relationships in this sample.

The results of this study also reveal that there is a significant interaction between conflict, sexual intimacy, and duration in determining relationship quality. These findings suggest that the interactions between these three predictors of quality combined, significantly influence the quality of relationships for college students. Religious similarity and religiosity were not

included in the stepwise linear regression model because they did not prove to have significant influences on quality of relationship in combination with the other three predictors.

It was hypothesized that religious similarity of couples would significantly influence the quality of a relationship in a positive correlation, however this study failed to find those results. This indicates that religious similarity in a relationship neither negatively nor positively influences the relationship quality of a relationship in a college setting. These findings follow in the findings for Joyner and Kao (2005) that there are no differences between intrafaith relationships and interfaith relationships in the assessment of quality. Concurrent with studies (Amodio & Showers, 2005) it can be seen that perceived similarity appears to be more strongly associated with relationship variables than actual similarity. Therefore participants in this study may not have seen religious similarity as something that was important in their relationships at the time and perceived similarity in other variables may have been more pertinent to their relationships.

#### Duration

Duration in this study negatively influenced the quality of relationships, and the overall duration of relationships for this study is also a source of complication. Due to the lack of previous research on the typical length of college relationships this finding could be related to a host of reasons. One reason that the duration of the relationship is fairly short may be due to the “hook-up” culture of colleges, which does not lend itself well to relationships in general. According to Bogle (2008), single students rarely meet each other through traditional dating now and the hookup (sexual activity) is now the norm for students on college campuses because of the prevalence of parties and social gatherings between the sexes. The number of current relationships in this study was far lower than that of participants having been in past

relationships. This may be due to participants not viewing dating as something that is important to them in college and viewing hooking-up as yielding itself to a more normative lifestyle.

### Conflict

As expected, conflict negatively influenced relationship quality. As conflict increased in the relationships the quality of the relationship lowered. Every relationships faces the possibility of facing conflicts and for this sample conflicts negatively influenced the quality of their relationships. Whether this is because of the way in which the conflicts were resolved, what the conflicts were about, or the degree of conflict is not known. However it was found in this study that the majority of participants did not feel like they fought with their significant other often. Participants also felt like their significant others were open to their concerns while in a conflict.

Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, and Kashy (2005) found that perceptions of relationship-based conflicts negatively impacted the perceived satisfaction in the relationship. Conflict in this sample was on the high range indication that perceived conflict was high and may have lead to the overall low measure of quality for the sample at hand. Greater perceived conflict has been shown to lead to decreased levels of love and commitment in relationships as well as satisfaction (Llyod, 1987).

### Sexual Intimacy

Sexual Intimacy was the only predictor that was positively correlated with quality. The results of the study show that sexual intimacy had the highest correlation with relationship quality indicating that it is the most important factor of relationship quality for this sample. Sprecher (2002) found that sexual satisfaction was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment. For this sample sexual intimacy was measured not only through whether or not the couple was sexually active but whether they were happy with the

level of intimacy. The overall satisfaction with level of intimacy of this sample provided a basis upon which quality of relationship could grow. This follows in line with Reiter & Gee's (2008) results that intimacy was the only relationship factor that strongly influenced quality and intercourse can be seen as an effective mean for building up emotional intimacy (Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1997).

### Limitations and Conclusions

The main limitation of the current study is the scales that were used to measure the variables. The scales used were measured by few questions, without much literature backing them. Using a scale that has previously been used to rate quality, conflict, and sexual intimacy may have yielded higher results, along with religiosity. Previous scales were not used in this study because of the desire to produce original work on the part of the researcher.

The sample of this study was also slightly biased because it was a convenience sample and used somewhat of a snowballing method for recruiting participants. All participants were either friends of the researcher or friends of friends of the researcher. This lead to most of the participants going to liberal arts colleges, mostly from the researcher's college. This may make religion less of an influential factor for the current sample because participants were not in highly religious settings for college as well as the fact that the process of leaving home and going to college may cultivate more secularized views for the word and in turn lead to less religiosity (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). The goal of this study was not to look into college students specifically in religious institutions but all college settings. However having more students from religious institutions would have made the sample more indicative of the population of college students as a whole.

Another influence for the non-significant findings could be that the mean age for the participants was 20.35 and young adults aren't necessarily preparing to get married in the near future so mate choice in college is less influenced by similarity. Because the goal of this study was to understand college student choices and relationships the age range is fitting, however it may have proved to be useful to ask more questions on future expectations in order to see whether religion would influence their choices at the time of marriage.

The fact that participants were combined into one group of participants is another significant limitation of this study. Participants in past relations may have significantly different views on the quality of their past relationships due to the fact that they may have animosity towards their ex-significant other and may view it as negative. Also asking participants to look back on previous relationships may prove to be problematic because experiences since the break-up may have influenced the way that they viewed their past relationships. For future studies it would be pertinent to look at only one group of participants, currently in relationships, and also interview/receive data from both partners in the relationship to view the overall quality of that relationship from both sides.

Another limitation of this study was asking participants, who were not in current relationships, to look back and rate a previous relationship. It is difficult to assure reliability when participants are self-reporting on previous and current relationships because they may not represent their true feelings rather than what they feel they should report or what is socially the norm for relationships. Retrospective reporting has the stigma of being inaccurate, suggesting that they are not reliable measures. Inaccurate recall of the past can result from over simplifications, lapses in memory, and inappropriate rationalizations (Golden 1992). However Miller, Cardinal, and Glick (1997) suggest that retrospective reporting is viable if the measures



used in the report are in themselves reliable and accurate. Unfortunately, reliability cannot be seen as high in the measures used in the reports of the current study because the measures were not based off of previously accurate scales.

Given the current findings, the current study adds to psychological literature in that it shows significant influences of conflict, sex, and duration on relationships in college. This is important because it shows how religion really does not influence relationships in college, which, even though it did not produce significant results, can be significant on its own. The fact that religion had no influence can be because of a variety of reasons and in future studies it would be imperative to look into these reasons. In future studies it would be pertinent to ask participants directly whether they think religion influences their relationships and why it does or doesn't.

This study also adds to the literature in that it provides information on the duration of college relationships as being overall fairly short, and the fact that most participants were not currently in relationships may prove useful to future researchers looking into length of relationships in college. However this study did not look into the reasons why the relationships were short in length, and why they dissolved. Because there is very little information on how long college relationships typically last, future directions should look into overall duration and reasons for the dissolution of relationships of college students.

In the future it would also be important to look into the different definitions of "relationships" for college students and whether they define "hook-up" partners as someone they are in a relationship with. The term relationship can have many definitions depending on the person you are asking so it would be important in the future to look into these differences and see whether or not they influence the quality of relationships as well.

In conclusion, it is important to investigate further the influences of religion on college relationships to determine how and why religion is becoming less of a salient factor in these relationships. The results provide evidence that religion has no influence on relationships in a predominantly liberal arts college population. If indeed religion plays no role in the quality of relationships in college we need to have a greater understanding of not only the reasons why this has occurred but also quantitatively more knowledge on variables that do in fact influence relationships.

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## Appendix

### *Appendix A*

\*1. This study is being conducted by Emma Jaffe, a senior psychology major at Scripps College, as a part of a senior thesis. You are being asked to participate because you are over 18 and are currently enrolled in college. The general purpose of this study is to research romantic relationships and religion in a college setting. This survey should take you no more than 10 minutes. You will be asked to answer a set of questions about your past and present romantic relationships along with religious beliefs. The benefits to this would be knowing that you helped provide data to further help this research project. The possible risks may be discomfort due to personal questions and eyestrain from looking at the computer.

Participation is voluntary and may be terminated at any point without repercussions. All data will be collected anonymously. Please contact Monsour for counseling if you feel like you need to talk to someone after taking the survey at 909-621-8202. If you are not a member of the 5cs go to <http://locator.apa.org/> to find a psychologist near you. If you have any questions or concerns about the study that have not been answered please contact Jennifer Ma, [jma@scrippscollege.edu](mailto:jma@scrippscollege.edu), or Linda Scott, the Administrator of the Scripps College Institutional Review Board at [linda.scott@scrippscollege.edu](mailto:linda.scott@scrippscollege.edu). If you have any questions for the researcher or would like to know the results please contact Emma Jaffe at [EJaffe1151@scrippscollege.edu](mailto:EJaffe1151@scrippscollege.edu). By selecting yes below you acknowledge that you are over 18 years of age, are currently enrolled in college, and have been, or are currently in a romantic relationship.

- Yes
- No

\*2. Please select the gender that you identify with

- Male
- Female

\*3. What is your age

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24

\*4. What College do you attend?

- Scripps
- Claremont McKenna
- Pitzer
- Pomona
- Harvey
- Mudd
- Other (please specify)

\*5. What year in college are you?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

\*6. Ethnicity:

- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino(a)
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- American Indian
- African American
- Other (please specify)

\*7. Is your college affiliated with a specific religion?

- No
- Yes (Please Specify)

\*8. What religion do you most strongly identify with?

- Christianity
- Judaism
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Mormon
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Other (please specify)

\*9. How religious do you consider yourself?

- Very Religious
- Somewhat Religious
- Somewhat Non-Religious
- Very Non-Religious

\*10. How religious do you consider your family?

- Very Religious
- Somewhat Religious
- Somewhat
- Non-Religious
- Very Non-Religious

\*11. How often do you practice your religion while at school? (Please select the option that is closest to your amount of practice)



- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once every 6 months
- Once a year
- N/A (not religious)

\*12. How often does your family practice their religion? (Please select the option that is closest to their overall amount of practice)

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once every 6 months
- Once a year
- N/A (not religious)

\*13. When applying to college did you list a religious preference?

- Yes
- No

\*14. How likely are you to reach out to your religion for support in everyday life?

- Very likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Very unlikely N/A (not religious)

\*15. Would you date someone who doesn't have the same religious beliefs as you?

- Yes
- No

\*16. Would you date someone outside of your religion who has a similar level of religiosity in their own religion?

- Yes
- No

\*17. Would your parents be accepting of you dating someone outside of your religion?

- Yes
- No

\*18. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

- Yes
- No

Please answer the following questions about your current relationship

\*19. What religion does your significant other identify with?

- Christianity
- Judaism
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Mormon
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Not Sure
- Other (please specify)

\*20. Please select the option that you most identify with

- My significant other and I both practice the same religion
- My significant other and I are both religious but follow different religions
- My significant other and I are both non-religious
- My significant other is religious and I am not
- My significant other is not religious and I am

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

\*21. I would rate the overall quality of our relationship positively

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*22. While under a large amount of stress, I feel like my significant other is able to support me emotionally.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*23. Overall, I feel supported emotionally by my significant other.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*24. My significant other and I are open about our religious beliefs.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*25. I feel like I can talk to my significant other about the religious aspects of my life.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*26. I feel like my significant other supports my religious beliefs.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*27. My significant other and I share similar values in sexual relations

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*28. Are you sexually active with your significant other? (This includes vaginal, oral, and anal sex)

- Yes
- No

\*29. My significant other and I are physically intimate. (This includes kissing, holding hands, etc.)

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*30. Does your religion permit you to be sexually active?

- Yes
- No

\*31. Does your significant other's religion permit them to be sexually active?

- Yes
- No

\*32. I would feel like I would be going against my religion if we became sexually active.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A not Religious

\*33. My significant other would feel like they were going against their religion if we were sexually active.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A Not Religious

\*34. I am happy with the level of intimacy with my significant other.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*35. My significant other and I fight often?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*36. When in a conflict with my significant other, I feel that they are open to my concerns.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*37. When in conflict with my significant other, I turn to faith to feel supported.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*38. Not having the same religious beliefs has been a point of conflict in our relationship.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A (share same beliefs)

\*39. I often feel pressured to be more religious because my significant other is more religious

than I am.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A

\*40. I often feel pressure to convert because my significant other is of a different religion than I.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A

\*41. How long have you been together?

- Less than one month
- 1-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-12 months
- Over a year- 2 years
- 2+ years

\*42. I feel like religion may play a factor in a future break up.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*43. I foresee our relationship ending up in marriage

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*44. Have you previously been in a romantic relationship?

- Yes
- No

Please answer the following questions about your most recent past relationship

\*45. What religion did your significant other identify with?

- Christianity
- Judaism

- Catholic
- Protestant
- Mormon
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Not Sure
- Other (please specify)

\*46. Please select the option that you most identify with

- My significant other and I both practiced the same religion
- My significant other and I were religious but follow different religions
- My significant other and I were both non-religious
- My significant other was religious and I am not
- My significant other was not religious and I am

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

\*47. I would rate the overall quality of my past relationship positively

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*48. While under a large amount of stress, I felt that my significant other was able to support me emotionally.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*49. Overall, I felt supported emotionally by my significant other.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*50. My significant other and I were open about our religious beliefs.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree

- Strongly disagree

\*51. My significant other and I shared similar values in sexual relations.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*52. Were you sexually active with your significant other? (This includes vaginal, oral, and anal sex)

- Yes
- No

\*53. My significant other and I were physically intimate. (This includes kissing, holding hands, etc.)

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*54. Did your religion permit you to be sexually active?

- Yes
- No

\*55. Did your significant other's religion permit them to be sexually active?

- Yes
- No

\*56. I would have felt like I was going against my religion if I had become sexually active.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A Not Religious

\*57. My significant other would have felt like they were going against their religion if we had become sexually active.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A Not Religious

\*58. I was happy with our level of intimacy with my significant other.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*59. My significant other and I fought often.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*60. When in a conflict with my significant other, I felt that they were open to my concerns.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*61. When in conflict with my significant other, I turned to faith for support.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*62. Not having the same religious beliefs was been a point of conflict in our relationship.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A (share same beliefs)

\*63. I often felt pressured to be more religious because my significant other was more religious than I am

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A

\*64. I often felt pressured to convert because my significant other is of a different religion than I.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- N/A

\*65. How long were you together?

- Less than one month



- 1-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-12 months
- Over a year- 2 years
- 2+ years

\*66. I feel like religion played a factor in our break up.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

\*67. This study is being conducted by Emma Jaffe, a senior psychology major at Scripps College, as a part of a senior thesis. You are being asked to participate because you are over 18 and are currently enrolled in college. The general purpose of this study is to research romantic relationships and religion in a college setting and to see if there is a correlation between religious affiliation and quality/duration of romantic relationships. Thank you for your participation! All data will be collected anonymously. Please contact Monsour for counseling if you have feel like you need to talk to someone after taking the survey at 909-621-8202 or <http://locator.apa.org/> to find a psychologist near you. If you have any questions or concerns about the study that have not been answered please contact Jennifer Ma, [jma@scrippscollege.edu](mailto:jma@scrippscollege.edu), or Linda Scott, the Administrator of the Scripps College Institutional Review Board at [linda.scott@scrippscollege.edu](mailto:linda.scott@scrippscollege.edu). If you have any questions for the researcher or would like to know the results please contact Emma Jaffe at [EJaffe1151@scrippscollege.edu](mailto:EJaffe1151@scrippscollege.edu).